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PP RUEHWEB

DE RUEHFR #0407 0791317
ZNY CCCCC ZZH
P 201317Z MAR 09
FM AMEMBASSY PARIS
TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC PRIORITY 5815
INFO RUEHZG/NATO EU COLLECTIVE PRIORITY
RHEHNSC/NSC WASHINGTON DC PRIORITY
RUEKJCS/SECDEF WASHINGTON DC PRIORITY

C O N F I D E N T I A L PARIS 000407

SIPDIS

E.O. 12958: DECL: 03/20/2019
TAGS: [PREL](#) [MARR](#) [NATO](#) [FR](#) [TU](#)
SUBJECT: FRENCH OUTREACH TO TURKS ON NATO REINTEGRATION

REF: PARIS 285

Classified By: Political Minister-Counselor for reasons 1.4(b) and (d).

11. (C) Senior French officials have contacted their Turkish counterparts to assuage possible concerns about the modalities of French reintegration back into the military command of NATO (reftel). Following General Jones' recent request to initiate outreach, both Jean-David Levitte, NSA-equivalent, and FM Kouchner had both telephoned their Turkish counterparts in the past couple of days to open a dialogue. Francois Richier, Strategic Affairs advisor at the French presidency, briefed Pol M/C on the results of those conversations during a meeting on March 19. According to Richier, when the two officials raised the subject of NATO reintegration, their Turkish counterparts were unwilling, or unable, to identify any concrete issues for discussion. Both conversations were reportedly pleasant but vague. When directly asked if there were any concerns, the Turks merely made general reference to their need to manage Turkish public reaction and asked if the French were following NATO procedures for the return. Levitte and Kouchner separately reassured the Turks that they were, and would continue, to follow NATO procedures and offered assistance in managing the Turkish public reaction. Kouchner is planning to travel to Turkey in mid-April for a conference and offered to make a public statement if needed, but this offer was refused. In both phone conversations, the French were left without any clear indication of Turkish concerns or intentions.

12. (C) According to Richier, the ambiguous results of their outreach efforts have left them debating three possible Turkish objectives: (1) an effort to link French reintegration with Turkish EU accession; (2) a desire to bargain for a specific bilateral request, such as support for a Turkish candidate for a post in an international forum; or (3) confusion about NATO procedural rules. However, Richier said that Paris was given no indication by Ankara of interest in either of the first two possibilities. In fact, Turkish FM Babacan specifically denied to FM Kouchner any interest by the GOT in linking NATO and EU. Richier said that the GOF may be willing to support a Turkish candidate in an international forum, but Paris has not been given any indication that Ankara may be seeking such support. Finally, Richier said that the French have provided reassurance about following NATO procedures and reemphasized to their counterparts that they are consulting closely with the NATO SYG and are following NATO guidance throughout this process. Pol M/C raised the question of whether redistribution of prized command posts within NATO may be raising sensitive bilateral concerns. Richier responded that he was unaware of anything in particular and reiterated that Franco-Turkish relations are better now than they had been recently. In sum, he emphasized several times that Paris was open to dialogue, but the Turks had not raised any specific concerns or requests in response to France outreach efforts.

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